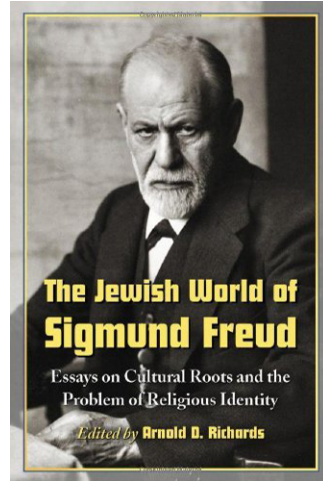


**The Jewish World of Sigmund Freud: Essays on Cultural Roots and the Problem of Religious Identity**

*Edited by Arnold D. Richards*

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This work provides an excellent introduction to a very important topic in psychoanalysis—the Jewish world of Sigmund Freud. This unique book, based on papers presented at a conference held at the Center for Jewish History in New York in December 2006, examines key aspects of Freud and his life, which are often underemphasized, neglected, or denied in psychoanalysis. Although it is less than two hundred pages, it is packed with information about Freud’s Jewish world, his identity, ideas about Jews, and the origins of Judaism—all of which provide a deeper understanding of Freud, psychoanalysis, and his cases.



In chapter 1, Salberg explores how the historical and cultural lives of Jews in the nineteenth century, and in particular, Freud’s parents, shaped his identity. She presents her ideas about how Freud’s mother’s personality, attitude toward Judaism, and his ambivalent relationship with her affected him and psychoanalysis: “Everything shameful for Freud becomes identified with the passive, the feminine and the Jew, and becomes hidden in the unconscious. This split is embedded within the very structure of psychoanalysis” (p. 19). This controversial position reduces the value of this interesting and comprehensive chapter; her extreme viewpoint oversimplifies, and at times even misunderstands, psychoanalytic theory and requires extensive debate, which cannot be elaborated on in this brief chapter.

In chapter 2, Rozenblit reviews Jewish immigration patterns throughout Europe and the growth of the Austrian Jewish population by the 1930s. She documents their economic transformation and assimilation, and highlights the anti-Semitism, which “blamed Jews for all their ills” (p. 25). She claims that Jews developed a “tripartite identity”—politically Austrian, culturally German, and ethnically Jewish” (p. 30). This chapter examines Freud’s ability to acculturate and assimilate, and yet to maintain his distinct ethnic identity as a Jew.

In chapter 3, Armstrong discusses how Freud's classical education at the gymnasium allowed for a solidifying of a separate secularized Jewish identity. He examines his identification with his beloved teacher Hammerschlag, who represented for Freud the ideal Jew, "happily tempered with a rational, humanistic ideal" (p. 39). Armstrong analyzes the Herr Aliquis episode from the *Psychopathology of Everyday Life*. He questions whether Herr Aliquis is a disguised representation of Freud and claims that Freud identifies with Hannibal as the substitute father figure. He suggests that, for Freud, the notion of being a Jew is caught up with being in opposition to the compact majority and was great training for being a "scientific conquistador" (p. 45).

Lensing (chapter 4) explores the influence of the *Neue Freie Presse*, and its adversary, Krause's *Torch*, on Viennese society, Freud, and psychoanalysis. He writes that the newspapers became an important part of contemporary middleclass Jewish life. While the *Neue Freie Presse* was a major vehicle for publishing information about psychoanalysis, Freud stopped writing for it in 1910, because he was concerned about the potential impact of Krause's satirical attacks on psychoanalysis.

In chapter 5, Gillman examines how Jewish issues enter into societal views of mental illness: the common belief held by major neurologists and psychiatrists (including Charcot and Oppenheim) was that Jews were predisposed to mental illness as a result of racial degeneracy. He notes that although Freud never entered into the debate about Jews and the heritability of madness, Freud firmly believed in the acquired nature of the illness and the cure through psychotherapy, and he rejected the "biological thinking of the anti-Semites" (p. 73). Gillman traces Freud's rejection of electrotherapy, and documents his interest in the psychological explanations and treatments of mental illness.

In chapter 6, Blum provides a fascinating examination of Freud's cases. He finds that Freud's case histories are filled with his patients' covert and overt references to conflicts about their Jewish identity and the rampant influence of anti-Semitism. Blum argues that Freud presumably failed to analyze these conflicts or address related transference and counter-transference issues, as a result of his own conflicts about Judaism (including internalized anti-Semitism), and his desire to present psychoanalysis as science—devoid of all religious influences.

In chapters 7–11, the authors discuss Freud's ideas about Moses and his controversial beliefs about the origins of Judaism. In sum, Freud believed that Moses was Egyptian and was murdered by the Jews (repeating the killing of the primal father), and that his murder compelled Jews to return

to the texts. Slavet summarizes Freud's argument, that is, that Judaism survives because the biologically transmitted memory traces of Moses and his traditions are transferred from one generation to the next. She says that his theory of Jewishness incorporates "racial materiality and the ideal intellectual materiality of the Jewish people" (p. 103).

Kleinberg (chapter 8) compares Freud's and Levinas's views of Moses. He claims they both used Moses to account for the transcendence and permanence of Judaism. For Freud, the essence of Judaism is revealed through psychoanalysis and science. For Levinas, the belief in the divine and the interpretation of the Talmud account for the permanence of Jewishness. Like Slavet, Kleinberg defends Freud's Lamarckian views and cites Dawkin's views on evolution as support for Freud's position.

In chapter 9, Gillman compares *Moses of Michelangelo* and *Moses and Monotheism* and suggests that Freud's Moses combines past and present representations. In her view, Freud used Michelangelo's statue and the Bible to deconstruct the traditional image of Moses, and thus he creates a composite—Egyptian, Midianite, heroic, passionate, retrained, universal, and Jewish. Gillman claims that Freud's attitude toward his Jewishness reflects the complexity typical of the Viennese modernists, who shared his ambivalence about Judaism and created new genres of cultural memories. She notes that Freud insisted that, despite his objections to religion, his "essence" was unalterably Jewish (Freud, 1930).

In chapter 10, Bergstein suggests that Freud's interest in Michelangelo's sculpture was consistent with his love for ancient and Westernized art, and it reflected his quest for self-identity. Michelangelo represented the quintessential Jewish patriarch—an antidote to his father, whom he perceived as weak (for being passive in reaction to an anti-Semitic assault).

Friedmann (in chapter 11) claims that Freud's religious/historical excursions are fascinating, but that *Moses and Monotheism* is Freud's attempt to understand anti-Semitism. She suggests that Freud's interpretation reflects his identifications, Oedipal conflicts, and fears. She notes that Freud imputed the causes of anti-Semitism to the Jewish character—passed on through a phylogenetic transfer of Moses's negative character traits: belief in the "superiority, ambitiousness, impatience" of the Jews (p. 145). While she acknowledges that aspects of Freud's analysis make sense—in that he traced the hatred of Jews back to the hostility inherent in monotheism (as a religion of the father)—unlike Slavet or Klein, she does not excuse Freud for his internalized anti-Semitism, blaming the victims, and "slurs against the Jewish character" (p. 146). She challenges Freud's idealized view of Akhenaten and documents Freud's ambivalence about God, religion, and Jews.

In chapters 12 and 13, the authors discuss Freud's death on Yom Kippur, September 23, 1939. Mecklenburg links Freud's assisted suicide to his despair over his exile and the mass murder of Jews by the Nazis. He questions the meaning of the date of his death: "Does he kill himself that day to symbolize the killing of the primeval father ... is it the ultimate slap in the face of religion, or is it the recognition of his religious roots?" (p. 164). Mecklenburg asks an interesting question but provides an oversimplified perspective on the possible meaning of Freud's death on Yom Kippur (Schur, 1972).

In chapter 13, Gerisch provides a more complex analysis of Freud's death. She reviews suicide rates in Germany, psychoanalytic theories of suicide, and Tausk's suicide and its impact on Freud and his circle. She concludes with a moving account of Freud's death, contextualized by her discussion of Freud's suffering, including the deaths of his grandson, daughter, his temperament/neuroses, and the toil of his illness. She leaves it to us to make sense of the personal and societal factors that may have contributed to Freud's decision to "leave the world with decency."

The final chapter provides an excellent summary that places Freud's Jewish world and psychoanalysis in context with nineteenth-century Vienna, history, and the contemporary times. Here Beller argues that psychoanalysis is in essence a "Jewish science" (p. 184). He claims that psychoanalysis is born out of the Jewish tradition of intellectuality, questioning, and search for the truth, rooted in Talmudic traditions, carried on in the intellectual/Jewish environment of nineteenth-century Vienna—still vitally relevant today.

Because this book is so packed with a diversity of information, it is difficult to synthesize all the data. While this may be related to the authors' attempt to understand so much information in relatively little space, it may also reflect the complex factors that must be considered when trying to understand Freud's Jewish world, identity, and beliefs about Jews, and how all of this relates to psychoanalysis. Freud said that he would leave it to science and future scholars to make sense of his Jewish essence. This book is an excellent place to start that journey.

### REFERENCES

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